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*On the ECONOMIC CONDITION of the HIGHLANDS of SCOTLAND.*

*By HIS GRACE the DUKE of ARGYLL, K.T.*

[Read before the Statistical Society, June, 1866.]

AT the courteous invitation of the Council, I was present here last year when a Paper was read by Professor L. Levi, "On the Economic Condition of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland." I was enabled, on that occasion, by the kindness of the President, to express to the Society my dissent from the professor's views, and I have now the honour of fulfilling an engagement into which I then entered, to record that dissent in a more definite and formal shape.

It is not my intention, however, to fatigue the Society by any minute criticism on the mere details of Professor Levi's paper. Whether those details are so put together as to give a true picture on the whole, is a question which will best be dealt with by presenting another picture of my own. There are of course a great many facts referred to in the paper which are not open to dispute. That the climate of the Highland counties is a wet one; that the country is a rugged one as regards a large portion of its area; that the proportion of population to the square mile is greatly less dense than in counties where the proportion of mountain is also less; that on Highland mountains the proportion of land under tillage to land under pasture is comparatively small; that on these same mountains, if we wander over them, our chances of meeting a sheep are at all times seven times greater than our chances of meeting a man; all these are statements which are true enough, although I do not see their relevancy to the general argument of the paper. Even as regards the various statistical tables and calculations of the paper, it is not my intention to examine their accuracy, because for the most part they seem to me to be wholly beside the real question at issue. I may mention, however, in passing, that as regards one or two of these tables, it is evident, at a glance, that Professor Levi has been led into some extraordinary mistakes. For example, at p. 379 I find a table which compares the four Highland counties with each other as regards the number of proprietors and the average size of properties in each. It was with infinite surprise I learned for the first time from this table, that there are fewer proprietors in Argyllshire than in the county of Sutherland—272 being assigned to Sutherland, and only 180 to Argyllshire. I thought it had been

sufficiently notorious that Sutherland is in the hands of a very small number of proprietors, and very little inquiry would have informed Professor Levi that, as compared with this condition of things, property in Argyllshire is in a multitude of hands. As a matter of fact, the number of Commissioners of Supply for the county of Sutherland, are six in number, the same body in Argyllshire amounts to ninety-eight.

I mention this case, however, chiefly for the purpose of saying that as it forms the subject of an important paragraph in the paper, and is made to bear upon the laws of primogeniture and entail, so extravagant an error has cast complete doubt in my mind over the accuracy of all the statistics of the paper—statistics, however, which I do not doubt were drawn up in entire good faith, and from sources which Professor Levi considered to be trustworthy; but in respect to which he has been unable to correct the most obvious blunders by any personal knowledge of the subject or of the country.

Having said so much, I pass at once from anything approaching to mere criticisms of detail, to state the main question in dispute as clearly and as broadly as I can. I do not wish to bind the professor to particular expressions, but to take the main conclusions of his paper, and to show that they are fundamentally unsound. Even where his facts are correct, they are stated in a false connection. To use a familiar expression, he has “got hold of the stick by the “wrong end,” and his general view of the existing condition of the Highlands is extravagantly erroneous.

First, then, Professor Levi represents the Highland counties to be, as compared with the rest of the country, in a stagnant or declining state; “subject to paralysing and deteriorating “influences;” with a “soil neglected,” “resources unknown and “unavailable,” and “capital quite beyond the reach of their forlorn “inhabitants.”

Secondly, he connects their condition next after the permanent effects of climate, mainly with the wilful discouragement of tillage, with clearances, and generally with those changes of management which have accompanied the development of sheep farming in the Highlands.

On both these points my view is precisely the converse. As regards the first, I hold as a matter of fact that no portion of the United Kingdom has made more rapid growth in agricultural improvement during the last one hundred years than the Highland counties. Secondly, I hold that this improvement, and the growing prosperity of the country, is due mainly to those very changes which Professor Levi says are the cause of a supposed decline. Thirdly, I think it can be shown conclusively that the only districts in the Highlands which are still in an unsatisfactory condition are

precisely those in which the older system has been clung to and maintained.

No two positions could be more sharply contrasted; the difference is fundamental—so fundamental, that it would almost seem as if there were left no common ground for argument.

I begin, therefore, with an endeavour to ascertain whether any such common ground exists, and if it does not exist in the form in which the argument has hitherto been stated, whether any common ground can be cleared by a better understanding on some first principles which are involved in the discussion.

Now at the very root of all Professor Levi's arguments, and colouring all his views of fact, lies the assumption that the one sufficient test of comparative prosperity or decline in any given country, is to be found in the increase, stationary character, or decrease in the number of its population. I must, on the contrary, lay down the principle, as lying at the very root of my argument, that the mere amount of population, apart from the social and economical condition of that population, is no test of prosperity whatever. The decrease of a population which lived in hovels and fed upon potatoes, and were incapable of producing any surplus from their labour, may be the very first condition of agricultural improvement.

Again, there can be no judgment formed of the decline or advancement of any country without an inquiry into its past condition. There is no such inquiry in Professor Levi's paper. Thus the very first elements of a question, which is essentially a question of comparison, are wanting in that paper. He pronounces our condition to be stagnant or declining; he does so by presenting a partial and exaggerated view of the evils which still remain, and by avoiding altogether any attempt to appreciate the evils which once existed.

Again, it is tacitly assumed throughout Professor Levi's paper, that value as measured by rent is quite a subordinate element in measuring the prosperity of an agricultural country. In fact it is not only treated as subordinate, but it is excluded altogether. From beginning to end of Professor Levi's paper, there is no attempt to estimate the increase of value. But this is not all. In a speech to the Highland Agricultural Society, at Inverness, I observed upon this omission, and that speech was replied to by Professor Levi in a letter addressed to the "*Morning Post*." In that letter Professor Levi refers to increased rentals, as measuring only the prosperity of "a few owners of land." I am almost ashamed to be called upon before a scientific society, to point out that this is not language worthy of a scientific question: that increased rent means increased produce and larger exports; that increased produce must be the

fruit of better agriculture, of larger capital, of natural aptitudes of soil put to more skilful use; and lastly, that a great increase in rent means a great increase in that surplus produce of labour upon which the increase of the general wealth of the community depends. I do not affirm that upon these grounds an increased rental proves the existence of all the elements we should desire in complete prosperity, but I do affirm that when we can say of an agricultural community that it yields for the consumption of other populations a large and increasing surplus of agricultural produce, and when there is no attempt even to prove a decline in social condition, the presumption is that such a community is itself advancing, as well as becoming more valuable to the communities around it; and the *onus probandi* is thrown entirely upon those who affirm of it that it is in a stagnant or declining state.

What I propose to do in this paper is, first, to say a few words on the condition of the Highlands up to the close of the civil wars; secondly, to notice the period of transition after the close of those wars, the causes and the effects connected with the introduction of sheep farming; thirdly, to give a more accurate picture of the present condition of the country than Professor Levi has supplied.

The genius of Sir Walter Scott has bathed in the light of imperishable romance the doings and the feelings of the old Highland clans. They had the virtues of all rude and warlike races. They were brave and hospitable, and faithful according to their own rough codes of honour. But the condition of the people was what it could not fail to be from the nature of the life they led, and from the nature of the country they inhabited. The land was a land capable of yielding adequate means of support only as a return to industry and skill. The life was a life in which industry was impossible, and in which agricultural skill was unattainable and unknown. The whole condition of society was founded on war as an habitual pursuit; a chief was powerful according to the number of his followers. The land was held and subdivided with a view to their increase up to, and beyond the bare limits of subsistence. There is abundant evidence that they lived in constant scarcity and exposed to frequently recurring seasons of famine. Mr. Cosmo Innes, than whom no man is more competent to speak with authority on the matter, has said of the old inhabitants of the Highlands that "they were always on the verge of famine, and every few years suffering "the horrors of actual starvation."\*

In corroboration of this remark, Mr. Innes has communicated to me a fact which throws a curious light on the condition in which the Highlands must have been when the condition even of some of the

\* "Sketches of Early Scottish History," p. 434.

richest counties in Scotland was one of dependence on the import of grain from foreign countries. In Charles the First's Parliament of 1633, a Bill was brought in "desiring that all impositions for restraining the inbringing of victual may be discharged, it being without example in any part of the world, and so much the more that *the whole sheriffdoms of Dumbarton, Renfrew, Argyll, Ayr, Wigtown, Nithsdale, stewartry of Kirkcudbright, and Anandale are not able to entertain themselves in the most plentiful years that ever fell out without supply from foreign parts.*" Accordingly there is abundant evidence of the constant scarcity and frequent starvation in which the Highland population lived. Some striking illustrations of this are given in Captain Burt's well-known letters written in 1726. Pennant, at a later period in the same century, speaking of Skye, says "the crops are most precarious; the poor are left to Providence's care. They prowl like other animals along the shore to pick up limpets and other shellfish, the casual repasts of hundreds during part of the year in these unhappy islands. Hundreds thus drag through the season a wretched life, and numbers unknown in all parts of the Western Highlands fall beneath the pressure, some of hunger, more of the putrid fever, the epidemic of the coast, originating from unwholesome food, the dire effects of necessity. The produce of the crops very rarely is proportioned in any degree to the wants of the inhabitants: golden seasons have happened when they have had superfluous, but the years of famine are ten to one."

This state of things is not astonishing; the only matter of astonishment is how any considerable population could have lived at all. Let us remember, in the first place, that the food which now for several generations has been the principal food of all poor agricultural populations, was not then available. There were no potatoes. Let us remember, in the second place, that the climate is a wet one, and that drainage was absolutely unknown. Let us remember, in the third place, that although potatoes will grow on damp and even wet soils, barley and oats will not grow except on land which is comparatively dry. Let us remember, in the fourth place, that in a mountainous country, with a wet climate and no artificial drainage, the best land in the bottoms of the valleys must have been very wet, and that even the sides of the hills must in most places have been covered with a boggy and spongy soil. It follows from all these considerations that corn could only be raised on those spots and portions of land which were dry by natural drainage. Sometimes these may have been in the bottoms of the valleys when the soil happened to be light and shingly, but more often they were on the steepest sides of the hills, on the banks of streams, and among the naturally dry and even stony knolls. Accordingly nothing is more

common in the Highlands than to see the old marks of the plough upon land so high and so steep, that no farmer in his senses would now consider it as arable at all. When these marks catch the eye of the stranger, full it may be of sentiment or of political economy, or of a confusion of both, he looks upon them and quotes them as the melancholy proofs of ancient and abandoned industry, of the decay of agriculture, in short of a stagnant declining state. Whereas in truth these are the most sure and certain indications of the low and rude condition of agriculture in former times; of the better lands which are now drained and cleared, and ploughed, having been then under swamp and tangled wood. When again we remember that such dry spots and patches of land as were then capable of bearing corn, were used for that purpose year after year; when we remember that there was no such a thing known as a rotation of crops, since turnips and potatoes were wanting; when we consider further, that even the rudiments of a system of manuring land were also unknown, it is impossible to be surprised that the population of the Highlands was exposed to frequent and severe famines, and we may well even wonder how any considerable population was maintained at all.

It is a common but erroneous notion, that the Highlanders, like the inhabitants of other wild countries, had at least an abundant supply of game. But neither was this resource extensively available. The country swarmed with foxes, eagles, hawks, and at an earlier period, with wolves. These animals effectually prevented the breeding of game; even the deer being unprotected, killed out of season, driven about and allowed no rest, were reduced extremely in number, and in the seventeenth century were found only in the remotest fastnesses of the country. So early as 1551 an Act of Parliament set forth that deer, roe, and wild fowl were clean exiled and banished from over persecution.

Indeed the only explanation of this difficulty is to be found in these two facts, first, that the population of the Highlands was never so great as is commonly supposed; secondly, that it was a population inured to hardship and accustomed to a very low scale of living; and thirdly, that such as it was it did not live on its own resources, but habitually eked out its own means of subsistence by preying upon its neighbours. This is the real explanation of the habit so famous in Highland story, of black mail raids upon the low countries of Scotland. Sir Walter Scott, who in all his novels keeps close to the facts of history and of nature, has put into the mouth of Bailie Jarvie, in "*Rob Roy*," the true explanation of a habit so unpleasant to those who lived within reach of the Grampians: "The military array of this Hieland country, were a' the "men-folk between aughteen and fifty-six brought out that could "bear arms, couldna come weel short of fifty-seven thousand and

“ five hundred men. Now, sir, it’s a sad and awfu’ truth, that there  
“ is neither wark, nor the very fashion nor appearance of wark, for  
“ the tae half of thae puir creatures; that is to say, that the  
“ agriculture, the pasturage, the fisheries, and every species of  
“ honest industry about the country, cannot employ the one moiety  
“ of the population, let them work as lazily as they like, and they  
“ do work as if a pleugh or a spade burnt their fingers. Aweel, sir,  
“ this moiety of unemployed bodies, amounting to one hundred  
“ and fifteen thousand souls, whereof there may be twenty-eight  
“ thousand seven hundred able-bodied gillies fit to bear arms, and  
“ that do bear arms, and will touch or look at nae honest means of  
“ livelihood even if they could get it—which, lack-a-day! they  
“ cannot. . . . And mair especially, mony hundreds o’  
“ them come down to the borders of the low country, where there’s  
“ gear to grip, and live by stealing, reiving, lifting cows, and the  
“ like depredations—a thing deplorable in any Christian country!—  
“ the mair especially that they take pride in it,” &c., &c.

My attention was called last autumn by an unknown correspondent, to a very curious and interesting document in the British Museum, which contains much valuable information on the condition of the Highlands immediately after the Rebellion of 1745. It is No. 104 in “the King’s Collection,” and is the account of an eye-witness, a gentleman who travelled all over the Highland counties, and communicated the result to a friend in London. It is very probable that he was an agent of the Government. He is mainly occupied in noting the military condition and strength of the clans, their politics and their character; but incidentally it gives us some valuable facts also touching the economic condition of the people. Thus in speaking of the district of Lochaber, he gives the following account of the small tenants who held under the tacksmen or leaseholders. “Each of these has some very poor people under him, “perhaps four or six on a farm, to whom he lets out the skirts “of his possession. These people are generally the soberest and “honestest of the whole. Their food all summer is milk and whey “mixed together without any bread; the little butter or cheese they “are able to make, is reserved for winter provision; they sleep away “the greater part of the summer, and when the little barley they “sow becomes ripe, the women pull it as they do flax, and dry it on “a large wicker machine over the fire, then burn the straw and “grind the corn upon quearns or hand mills. In the end of harvest “and during the winter, they have some flesh, butter, and cheese, “with great scarcity of bread. All their business is to take care of “the few cattle they have. In spring, which is the only season in “which they work, their whole food is bread and gruel, without so “much as salt to season it.”



No mention is made here of another source of food which, however, it is well known was a constant and habitual resource to the people of the Highlands, viz., the bleeding of live cattle and the mixing of the blood with meal. It is quite obvious how this practice should arise in a country where the people were constantly struggling with scarcity. But it is a curious circumstance that like other customs originating in necessity, it gathered round it for its support reasons and opinions which are still sometimes given as the true explanation of its origin. It came to be considered as beneficial, not only to the men who consumed the blood, but to the poor beasts who afforded it; and there is ground for believing that on the strength of this notion the practice did actually linger on in the Highlands after it had ceased to be a necessity for the support of life. I have met with many Highlanders of middle age, who recollect their fathers speaking of it as a custom general in their own younger days. Under such habits of life, and such conditions of husbandry, it is impossible that the Highland counties can ever have been thickly peopled. It is very difficult, however, to arrive at any even approximate estimate of the population before the close of the civil wars. The most definite information I have seen is that given in the MS. already referred to. It will surprise many to be told that the greatest number of men in arms against the Government in the Great Rebellion of 1745, from the beginning to the end of that rebellion, did not exceed 11,000 men. In the same paper an estimate is given of the number of men in arms which each clan could turn out, and the comparative smallness of that number, even in the case of the most powerful clans, is remarkable. It is specially mentioned, not only that Argyllshire was then the most fertile of the Highland counties, but that ever since the Union the proprietors of land there "had made very great improvements, " whence it came that they were all in easy circumstances." The Campbells, including both the Argyll and Breadalbane branches, are put down as able to turn out 3,000 men, besides leaving at home enough to carry on the usual cultivation of the soil. The Gordons had at one time been able to produce an equal number, but were then much reduced. But when we come to the western and northern clans, the numbers are comparatively small.

The Stuarts of Apine could bring 300 "good" men into the field.

The Camerons from first to last, during the Rebellion of 1745, brought into the field over 900 effective men, of which number they lost above 400.

Keppoch, of Lochaber, "joined the rebels with 300 stout fellows, all Popish."

Glengarry could raise "about 500 strong fierce fellows."

Lord Lovat could have raised 900 men, "a third part of which  
"were extremely bad."

McPherson of Cluny, 400.

The Farquharsons of Invercauld, 400.

Rose of Kilravock, 300.

The clan of the Grants, of Strathspey, consisted of "about 1,000  
"good men."

The Gordons "who one hundred and fifty years ago could have  
"brought of their vassals and tenants 3,000 men into the field, are  
"now so greatly degenerated that all the Highland clans despise  
"them."

"The Duke of Argyll and his clan, including Breadalbin, can  
"raise 3,000 men, and leave enough at home for cultivating the land  
"and other necessary uses; and if the Campbells were to raise their  
"men as the Camerons and McDonalds, they could bring together  
"above 10,000 able to bear arms."

It is specially mentioned in the King's MS., that the McLeods of Skye, who were zealous royalists, had lost in the civil wars, and especially at Worcester, so many men that, by the general consent of all the northern clans, it was agreed they should have a respite from war till their numbers should increase.

Such having been the condition of the Highland population about the close of the civil wars and at the termination of the last rebellion, it remains to inquire what progress they had made during the period of peace and of comparative prosperity which occupied the remainder of the eighteenth century. There were three great causes which during that period were brought into operation upon the condition of the people. First, there was the natural effect of a settled Government, the saving of life from the cessation of civil war, feuds, and broils; secondly, there was the saving of life, not less important, from the introduction of inoculation for small-pox; and thirdly, there was the first introduction of potatoes as a new and most abundant means of subsistence. Potatoes were first introduced in the island of South Uist so early as 1743, by Clanranald, from Ireland. Their use seems to have been violently resisted at first by the inhabitants; and we are told that they did not reach the next island of Berna till 1752, whilst in the course of another ten years they had come to support the whole inhabitants for at least one-quarter of the year. Once established, their use soon spread over the Highlands, and their effect in promoting the increase of population must have been as powerful as it has elsewhere been. Inoculation was introduced into the Highlands in 1763, and as it appears never to have encountered the same hostile prejudices which existed in other parts of the country, and as the people generally are described as having accepted the new discovery "with devout thank-

"fulness,"\* this also must have tended powerfully in the same direction.

As the Malthusian law is universal, that it is the tendency of population to press upon the limits of subsistence, it cannot be doubted that with the removal of so many checks upon their increase, the people of the Highlands must have multiplied rapidly during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The truth is they did multiply, not only up to, but far beyond the limits of their subsistence, and hence arose that great stream of emigration which has been the theme of so much natural but ill-informed complaint. It has never yet, I think, been pointed out with sufficient clearness or prominence, that the immense emigration of the Highlanders arose out of an extravagant rate of increase during and before the period in which that emigration began. It will surprise, I think, many who suppose that no such emigration could be supported without a complete depopulation of the country, to be told that for many years during the period I refer to, the rate of increase in the Highlands was more rapid than that of the most thriving cities at the present moment. It can be proved beyond all reach of doubt, that if we except the introduction of the potato, there was no corresponding increase in the produce of the soil—no advance in husbandry to support in even tolerable comfort the advance in numbers. And it is a curious circumstance that the very writers who deplore most loudly the emigration, or what they call the subsequent depopulation of the Highlands, are the same writers who supply us with the most conclusive evidence as to the facts which prove that emigration to have been nothing but the natural and legitimate results of great natural economic laws.

I will take two remarkable examples.

There was published in 1804 a poem by a certain Mr. Alexander Campbell, the title of which was "The Grampians Desolate." I cannot say much for the merit of it in a poetical point of view, but the notes and appendices which are added to illustrate the subject of the poem, contain much valuable information and evidence on the causes of the depopulation which the poet deploras. In one of these notes he gives a narrative, from personal knowledge, of transactions connected with certain farms in Lochaber, which exhibit to us in the clearest light both the old state of things, the period of transition, and the effect of the new husbandry upon the general condition of the country. Mr. Campbell then, it appears, held along with another member of his family, his son-in-law, a Captain McDowell, certain large farms on the Gordon estate; they were, as they always must be from the nature of the country, chiefly grazings,

\* "Walker," vol. ii, p. 354.

and the stock was sheep and black cattle. But the lower parts of the holding, including four separate farms, were sublet on the old Highland system, among no less than thirty-eight families. These families were allowed to have summer grazings on the hills adjoining the pastures of the tacksman. Mr. Campbell took the management in 1794, and the following is the account he gives of the husbandry of these people. "Although the lands were let remarkably low, yet the mode of farming was wretched in the extreme, consequently the farmers were very poor, and the payment of their rents a thing next to impossible. Their infield and outfield patches of arable land were yearly scratched with a thing somewhat shaped like a plough; the seed scattered on the surface, and harrowed in with a few sticks pinned together with wooden pins (the teeth also made of wood); and things were left in this state till the beginning of autumn, when the women, children, and herdsmen returned from the summer pastures among the hills—to reap—what?—little more, perhaps, than a scanty crop of straw, with as much corn, when threshed, as was scarcely equal to the quantity sown a few months before, and sometimes, indeed, not quite so much! Their houses, according to the fashion of their forefathers, were built of turf, usually cut from the best sward of the whole farm, being the firmest, consequently the best for that purpose. The farmers, if they deserved that title, saved little or no manure for dressing their lands; but when they required any dung for potatoes or barley—down with one end of the house, which having been well smoked, was most excellent manure, and near at hand for the exigency of the moment! Nay, will it be believed? the vigilant, industrious farmer, his guidwife, and bairns would occupy one end of the house while the other was being pulled down for the purpose above stated, till Fear-an-tigh (the guidman) should find sufficient leisure to cut turf from the best spot on the whole farm and build a new house."

Meanwhile the price of sheep and cattle was rising. Every year was establishing more firmly the great value of the Highland grazings to those who had capital to stock them. In 1799, the term of the lease or tack was drawing to a close, Captain McDowell applied to the Duke of Gordon for a renewed lease, founding his claim on the old feudal connection of his family with the duke's. The duke responded to the plea, but informed Captain McDowell that he had been offered *four times* the rent at which the lands were then held, and added that on account of the old connection, he was willing to sacrifice one-fourth of the market value of his lands, and relet the farm at three-fourths of the rent he had been offered by others. Captain McDowell was a soldier, entirely ignorant of rural affairs, and he doubted whether he could pay the rent, even at one-fourth less

than a regularly trained farmer was willing to pay. Mr. Campbell, however, persuaded him to accept it. He had, partly by compulsion and partly by persuasion, done something to improve the rude and ignorant husbandry of the subtenants; he had also raised their rents, and he had now a scheme of converting the subtenants into a sort of joint-stock concern, and thus of keeping them in the country. Mr. Campbell is very proud of the result he attained, and what was it? He says that after paying rent, interest on stock, and expenses, he finds that each subtenant, aided by a constantly advancing price of cattle, did actually, on an average, realise a profit of between 3*l.* and 4*l.* a-year, which enabled him to educate and clothe his children and live decently suitable to his humble condition. That is to say, that at the sacrifice of one-fourth of the produce of the land, these subtenants were able to realise in twelve months about as much as an able-bodied navvy can now earn with certainty in little more than three weeks. Now I do not blame the Duke of Gordon for having given a great farm to a tacksman wholly ignorant of farming, at the sacrifice to himself of one-fourth of the value of his land, and at the sacrifice to the community of one-fourth of the produce which that land was capable of yielding. Such concessions to demands founded on old ties, and to conditions of society which are in course of change, are concessions which all Highland proprietors have frequently been called to make. Neither do I blame the tacksmen for having tried in like manner to retain upon their farms thirty-eight families, when probably less than half that number was more than could occupy the land with profit to themselves or with advantage to the country. But I do object to these results being regarded as in themselves desirable, or as economically the best that could be desired. And when in the gradual progress of time and of events both the land and the men are turned to better use, and a large amount of produce is obtained by less labour more skilfully applied, I object to this result being described before a scientific society as the proof of a stagnant and declining state.

Again, I pass to another author of much the same date, but one who wrote, not as a poet, but as a man of science. In 1808 an interesting and important work on the "History and Condition of the Highlands and Islands," was published in Edinburgh by a Dr. John Walker, who had been Professor of Natural History in the University of Edinburgh. In the concluding chapter he refers to the emigration of the people, and looking at it in a general and theoretical point of view, he regards it as likely to be excessive, and therefore as an evil to be deplored, and if possible to be checked. Yet I know no work which proves more clearly than his that that emigration arose out of the necessities of the case,—that it was the

one indispensable preliminary step towards an improved condition, and a more skilful agriculture.

In the first place he shows that there had been a great and rapid increase of population immediately consequent on the establishment of settled law and order in the Highlands. In the second place he shows that there was no corresponding increase in the means of subsistence arising out of any improvement in the system of agriculture. In the third place he shows that this increase was such, that after supplying a continuous stream of emigration for many years, and after supplying also the British army with a large number of men for its continental and colonial wars, it still left every farm encumbered with a population for whose labour there was no room, and for which, therefore, there was no employment. Fourthly, he shows that the first step towards a better agriculture was, that there should be a more definite separation between the class of farmers and the class of labourers, and consequently a large diminution of the number of tenants. And lastly, he lays down the great economic rule, as not less applicable to agriculture than to every other productive industry, that the object to be attained is increased amount of produce from a diminished amount of labour.

I shall now indicate to the Society some of the evidence furnished by Dr. Walker on each of these points.

First as regards the increase of population consequent on a settled Government, Dr. Walker gives a table showing that increase in a great number of parishes, stretching for 300 miles from Cantire to Cape Wrath.

Twenty-two parishes in the Hebrides, north of Cantire, contained of inhabitants,—

In the year 1750, or soon before it, 36,067.

In the year 1755, by Dr. Webster's list, 37,126.

By an exact enumeration taken in the country, anno 1764, 42,574.

By the statistical accounts between the years 1791 and 1795, 53,236.

The five parishes in the Hebrides, south of Cantire, comprehending Bute, Arran, and Cumbrays, contained,

In the year 1750, or soon before it, 7,134.

In the year 1755, by Dr. Webster's list, 8,384.

By an exact account taken in the year 1771, 9,331.

By the statistical accounts between the years 1791 and 1795, 11,072.

Twenty-four parishes on the mainland, north of Cantire, and chiefly on the coast; contained,

In the year 1750, or soon before it, 34,298.

In the year 1755, by Dr. Webster's list, 34,536.

By a particular account taken in the country in the year 1764, 37,772.

By the statistical accounts between the years 1791 and 1795, 43,568.

*Observations.*

“ 1. These last twenty-four parishes form a chain on the west coast of Scotland, near 300 miles in length. It appears that the inhabitants of this tract increased about 3,000 in number between the years 1755 and 1764. The real increase, however, was much greater; for, beside the usual emigrants, the seven years’ war intervened between these years, during which time these twenty-four parishes were drained of men for the land and sea service.

“ 2. It appears also that the people of this district have increased about 6,000 in number from the year 1764 to the year 1795; but this is far from being the real amount of its population, for during that term of years great numbers of the inhabitants have been drawn off to the American and the present war; and a great part of the people who have emigrated to America since 1771, were from these parishes.

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“ 4. In general the above fifty-one parishes in the Hebrides and West Highlands, contain at present 107,876 inhabitants, which is probably a greater number than ever subsisted in them before.

“ Their increasing population from the year 1755, and especially since the year 1764, is remarkable and fully ascertained. Notwithstanding repeated wars and frequent emigrations, the number of people in those distant parts has continued to increase, greatly to the national advantage.

“ 5. Such an overflowing population where there is not full employment for the people, must induce many of them to leave the country.”

On the second point—the wretched and unimproved state of agriculture in the Highlands, when Dr. Walker wrote in 1808, he gave the most clear and specific evidence;—

*Infield and Outfield.*

“ The division of a farm into infield and outfield, was the ancient and universal custom in Scotland, and still subsists not only over all the Highlands, but in most parts of the kingdom, and yet every proper plan of agriculture requires that it should be universally abolished. It has accordingly been laid aside in all those parts of the country where husbandry is best understood.

“ The infield is, in general, a piece of land that is naturally good; the farm-house always stands upon it, and this seems to have

“determined the situation of all the old farm-houses in Scotland. It receives all the manure that the farm affords. It is usually distributed into three divisions, or kevels as they are called; each of these is manured over in three years, and for this it must produce a crop of beans and two crops of oats. These crops are usually but of a very middling sort, and by no means equivalent to the manure and labour that is bestowed upon them. Sometimes there is a fourth division, which is suffered to remain by, or is used for potatoes; but in general the infield is kept constantly in tillage and white crops.

“The outfield again, though all arable, is regarded as a waste. When the infield, or croft land, is worth 20s. or 30s., the outfield will not be worth above 2s. or 3s. an acre. It never receives any manure, except a small part which has the cattle folded upon it in summer. It yields grass of the poorest quality; and when it has remained by from four to seven years, and is overrun with mosses, it is ploughed for three crops of oats. No land should be laboured by the plough for oats, unless it afford an increase of fivefold; but it is well known that these outfield lands do not yield near so much; they seldom yield four, and frequently not even three seeds. It is plain, therefore, that they should be cultivated in some other manner. This is a scene of husbandry that is really deplorable, especially as it is carried on by a sensible, frugal, and laborious set of people; but unfortunately they have no knowledge of anything better. To change their practice they want only proper instruction and proper example.”

I now pass to the third point, viz., the excess of population on Highland farms when Dr. Walker wrote, after all the emigration and other methods of depopulation, to which he refers as having been then long in operation. He says:—

“Any person acquainted with the state of husbandry in other parts of Scotland, must at once be surprised at the great number of servants retained upon a Highland farm. Many farms in the south of Scotland are exactly similar to many in the Highlands; consisting of hill grounds, with a stock of black cattle or sheep, and a certain portion of arable land. Yet upon a farm of this kind in the north, you will find more than double the number of servants that are kept upon a farm of the same rent in the south of Scotland. In the south the power of labour is adapted, and sometimes too narrowly adapted, to the size of the possession, whether large or small. But in the Highlands the number of men and horses upon a farm are often found equal to what they are upon another farm much larger, both in rental and in extent.

“A superfluous number of servants and horses must be a heavy load both upon the landlord and tenant. It is not to be supposed



“that the farmers in the Highlands subject themselves to this burden from choice, whatever they may do from the prevalence of custom; but there are circumstances in the present situation of the country that naturally lead to the present practice.

“In most places three men are required to attend an ill-constructed plough; one to hold it, another to drive four horses abreast, and a third to follow with a spade to rectify the imperfection of the tilth. Beside these where the reestle is used to precede the plough, one man is employed to hold it, and another to drive one or two horses. By this awkward management, five men and five or six horses are required for a feeble plough. Thus by the want of proper instruments of husbandry, the number of men servants and horses is rendered much greater than is necessary.

“The want of day labourers also oblige the farmer to keep more men servants than what he constantly requires, but whose labour at particular seasons is necessary. On a grazing farm the management of the milk makes a considerable article, and this, with the labour of procuring peats in summer, calls for a number of hands. These causes, with the low wages of the servants, their easy maintenance, and the established custom of the country, all conspire to render the number of servants upon a Highland farm far larger than anywhere else.

“A man who rents 5*l.* a-year, will be found to keep six horses. On a farm of 20*l.* a-year, you will find twelve or fourteen men and women servants. Even when every allowance is made for the situation of the country, there certainly must be something wrong in this economy. Mr. McAulay, Minister of Ardnamurchan, who possessed a stellbow farm of 100*l.* rent, executed all the cultivation upon it with four men servants, which employed eight when this farm was in the possession of a country tenant. Notwithstanding all the circumstances mentioned above, it is probable that there are few farms in the Highlands which might not be equally well cultivated with one-third, and some with one-half fewer men servants and horses than what are used at present.”

On the same point, Pennant says, when speaking of Skye, “a tacksmen of 50*l.* a-year often keeps twenty servants, the laziest of creatures, for not one will do the least thing that does not belong to his department.

“This number of servants seemed to answer the retainers in great families, before that pernicious custom was abolished by Henry VII. The cause is now no more, but the habit can’t be suddenly shaken off.”

On the fourth point, which is a question both of fact and of principle, viz., the necessity, as a first step to improvement, of a more definite division of employment and of labour, so that farmers

shall be farmers and labourers should be labourers,—Dr. Walker lays down the sound principle with reference not only to theory, but with reference to the experience of all other portions of the country where an improved agriculture had been established. He says that “the improvement of Britain has been accomplished by “servants hired upon wages in money or in grain, not by people “who were also employed in the cultivation of land on their own “account. It is therefore to be wished that the same practice “should take place in the Highlands; that all farm servants should “be bound to their master’s work without any other avocation, and “that all persons who possess land should have their whole labour “secured to them without any infringement.”

Lastly, Dr. Walker introduces his remarks on these portions with the enunciation of this economic principle: “It is a great “object in agriculture to execute the work that is required with the “least power and at the least expense.”

It will be observed from the quotations I have made from Dr. Walker’s work, that emigration from the Highlands had not only begun, but had become so considerable as to attract attention long before sheep farming on a large scale had been introduced, and long before it became generally prevalent in the Highlands. It is not less remarkable, as indicating one of the most deeply seated causes of that emigration, that, contrary to the general notion, it began not with the poorer but with the upper classes—with the military retainers—the gentlemen tacksmen, who under the old system were in fact a class of middlemen between the proprietor and the smaller tenants. They were generally men more skilled in arms than in agriculture. When a great rise in the value of cattle took place, and the proprietors desiring to share in the increased value of the produce of their estates, very generally raised their rents, these tacksmen of the old class found their position changed. They were accustomed to a rude abundance, to rents paid in kind, and to these rents being largely furnished to them out of the holdings of their subtenants. But on the one hand, they had now become accustomed, in the ranks of the British army, to a higher style of living; and on the other hand they found an increasing difficulty in giving for their lands such rents as a class of professional farmers were found ready to give, even in the rude and unimproved state of stock farming which then existed. Hence the first movement of emigration came from the gentlemen tacksmen. It was followed gradually, but continuously, by the emigration of that numerous class, yearly becoming more numerous from feeding and breeding on potatoes, whose labour was not only useless, but an encumbrance in the progress of agricultural improvement.

I now pass to another point of great importance in estimating

the nature of the change which has made the Highland counties so largely dependent on sheep grazing. It is indeed a strange inversion of the truth to interpret this change as an indication of a stagnant or declining state, to connect it, directly or indirectly, with a backward movement as compared with other more thriving parts of Scotland. The fact is, that this change had already been accomplished in other parts of Scotland long before, and upon that change their prosperity had been founded. It will be remembered that Professor Walker remarks that many other parts of Scotland resembled the Highlands in physical geography and in the nature of the soil, the farms being largely composed of moorland or mountain pasture, with a comparatively small extent of arable land. But in those other parts, especially on what might be called the Border Highlands, sheep farming on a large scale had been long established. In the middle ages, the great middlemen of the border counties are known to have possessed flocks of sheep as numerous as those now possessed by the largest graziers. It was the ignorance and barbarism of the Highlands alone which had prevented a similar system of agriculture being adopted there. There never was a country in the world in respect to which nature has pointed out more clearly the agricultural use to which it is specially adapted. Wild and rugged as it is, a great portion of its mountain ranges are placed under a mild and moist climate, most favourable to the growth of natural pasture. Except upon the highest summits, and some of the midland masses, snow lies seldom, and never for any long time together. Along the whole extent of the western coast, mountains of great elevation are covered to the very top with a rich and luxuriant vegetation; and even those peaks and ranges which are largely occupied by rocks and stones, have a fine though scanty herbage of their own. It is impossible to describe to those who have not seen it, the beauty and exuberance of the mountain pastures in the fulness of the year. They always remind me of the expression in the Psalms, "Thy paths drop fatness."

Now, what use was made under the old Highland system of these abundant treasures of their soil and climate? Of the very best parts of it they made, as we have seen, but a poor and scanty use; and of by far the largest part of the whole area of their country they made literally no use whatever. Black cattle and a few goats were the only stock in the country. Every one knows that cattle will not ascend to the higher ranges, and they are incapable of climbing among the rocks to reach the innumerable small and broken but rich fields of pasture which are scattered among them. Let us hear what Dr. Walker says of the actual practice pursued in the Highlands at the time he wrote, as regards the use made of the upland pastures:—

“ In most Highland farms there is a small portion of arable ground and a large extent of mountain pasture considerably distant. The homestead is on the arable land, and generally situated on the seashore, by the side of a lake or river, or low in a valley. Here the farmer with his cottagers live in what are called their winter houses. Soon after the middle of June, when the arable land is sown, they emigrate from these dwellings with their cattle to a mountainous place belonging to the farm. Here they quickly erect or repair their summer houses or sheilings, which are composed entirely of sods and the branches of trees. In these dwellings they live during the summer; their only occupation is tending the cattle on the heights, and the manufacture of the butter and cheese. Their chief sustenance is oat or barley meal, with milk in its different forms. In this way they pass the fine season in a pastoral and cheerful manner of life, of which the people are extremely fond. When the corn begins to ripen, about the middle of August, they leave their pleasant summer residence and return to their winter houses. This method of management is natural to the situation of the country, and is not peculiar to the Highlands. The same prevails in other parts of the world, and especially in Switzerland: there the inhabitants live and labour in the valleys for the greatest part of the year, among their own cornfields and vineyards; but during the height of the summer they enjoy what is called the Alpinage. They ascend the Alps to considerable heights, and live with their flocks in the same way, though in a preferable situation, with the inhabitants of the Highlands.

“ By far the greatest part of the pasture in the Highlands is situated at great heights, and much of it in places inaccessible to cattle from October till May. Yet upon these heights, and even upon the summits of very high mountains, there is in the summer time a profusion of excellent herbage. To these places the cattle do not willingly repair but in the finest season, and will even desert them in summer on the approach of wind or rain; for in rigorous weather they are at all times more covetous of shelter than pasture. These high pastures cannot be fully applied to use, or be consumed, but by means of diligent herding. By the neglect of this the greatest part of them goes to waste. They are not sufficiently eaten up during summer, and no cattle are kept upon them after the end of August. In consequence of this a rank and excellent forage is everywhere to be seen at these great heights in September and October, which is entirely lost. All this might be avoided and much gained, if the cattle were confined to these high pastures by careful herding, which they might very well be till the end of October. The forage in the low grounds would then be

“spared during the whole autumn, and become highly serviceable  
“in winter when it is most required.

“*Herding.*

“The above art is well understood and carefully practised by the  
“storemasters of the south in the pasturage of sheep. The flocks  
“are attentively herded from morning till evening. They are not  
“suffered to stray at large, but are directed by the shepherd in their  
“walk during the day, and to their resting-place at night. They are  
“conducted to the pasture proper for them at the different seasons,  
“and in such a manner that the whole herbage upon the farm is  
“rendered useful. This practice of the south country herds is  
“known to many people in the Highlands, and they ought to observe  
“it carefully in the management of their sheep. But to observe it  
“in the management of their black cattle is a matter of still greater  
“moment. Yet in this article they are in most places inexcusably  
“inattentive. The cattle are not properly herded, nor directed to  
“their pasture with sufficient care; they are allowed to roam at  
“large over the whole farm; they are suffered to pick and choose  
“their own pasture, which can never turn out either to the advantage  
“of the farmer or to the benefit of the stock at large. The grass at  
“great heights is neglected, and left to decay and wither in the winds.  
“The coarser grasses in the lower parts, to which the cattle ought to  
“be confined during summer, are avoided, and in a great measure  
“lost. The spots of fine grass which should be their relief early in  
“spring and late in autumn, are perpetually eaten to the ground.  
“In this matter there is no dependence to be had on the instinct of  
“cattle, for they would rather have a mouthful of such fine grass  
“than a bellyful of grasses of a coarser kind. To consume the coarse  
“pasture upon a farm at the proper season, they must be compelled  
“by careful herding. It is only in this way that the whole pasture  
“upon a Highland farm can be turned to its full account.

“The farm servants in the Highlands are not accustomed to that  
“regular and assiduous herding of cattle that is necessary in a  
“pastoral country. They look after them only by fits and starts, and  
“without a due regard either to the nature of their food, or of the  
“grounds which they ought to occupy. The servants employed are  
“not even clothed for the purpose. Hardy as they are, a tartan  
“jacket, a kilt, and brogues that take in and give out the water as it  
“comes, cannot afford sufficient shelter to a man who is to remain  
“the whole day abroad in cold winds, rain, and snow. In the moun-  
“tainous parts of the south of Scotland, and in as severe situations  
“as any in the Highlands, the herds are clothed in a different  
“manner. Besides an under waistcoat, they have clothes of warm  
“coarse cloth, warm stockings of a double thread, strong thick

“shoes, and a large thick plaid to cover them entirely upon every emergency. Thus clothed they can continue all day in the most boisterous weather, and remain abroad, as they often do, in the most tempestuous nights; but without such raiment they could neither pursue their business nor do justice to their masters.”

Under these conditions of agriculture, it is not too much to say that more than one-half, probably it would be more correct to say that more than three-fourths of the total meat-producing acreage of the country was entirely and absolutely lost, and that the conversion of the mountains into sheep grazings was as much a reclamation of waste lands as if the whole of that vast area had been for the first time reclaimed from the sea. Sheep are wonderfully adapted for the complete consumption of all available pastures. They climb everywhere, and are never so healthy and strong as when they have wide and steep ranges as their feeding ground. Accordingly the moment their adaptability to the Highlands was established, they spread rapidly over the whole of it. The increase of value consequent on this husbandry, has been enormous; and, notwithstanding Professor Levi's objection, I must indicate to the Society what has been this increased contribution of the Highlands to the national wealth, by representing it in the figures of rental. Thus, I am told of one estate which at the beginning of this century was offered under lease at 400*l.* a-year, and is now worth 10,000*l.* a-year; that is, the rise has been in the proportion of 100 to 4. I know cases myself where, even within the last twenty-two years, the rise has been from 200*l.* to 1,100*l.*

Pennant gives some data which enable us to estimate the value of the cattle exported (1772) from the large parish of Gairloch in West Ross at about 1,260*l.* I am informed by the proprietor that the value of its exports now is upwards of 13,000*l.* In this case there has been also a great increase of population; his estimate was 2,800; the census of 1861 gave 5,438.

Of the next parish of Loch Broom, Pennant says that as in most of the other lochs, only a very few of the natives possessed boats. Now I am informed almost the whole population have nets and shares in boats for the herring fishery.

The truth is, that the diminution of a population purely agricultural, so far from being a phenomenon affecting the Highlands only, is but one example of the effects of a great general law, which has been operating and is now operating over the richest and most highly civilized countries in the world. To increase produce, and at the same time to economise labour, is the double object and the invariable result of every improvement in the arts. The art of agriculture is no exception; in it, as in all others, the advance of knowledge and of skill dispenses with a large share of the labour of

human hands. This, at least, is the result of one stage, and that a most important one, in the progress of agriculture;—a population numerous, but accustomed to, and contented with a low standard of living for themselves, and yielding no surplus for the support of others, gives place to a population smaller in amount, but enjoying a higher civilization, and contributing in a corresponding degree to the general progress of the world. Thus it is that the richest and most productive parts of our own country are comparatively the most thinly peopled. The splendid agriculture of the Lothians and of Berwickshire, exhibits miles of country in the highest condition of cultivation, with a singular paucity of human habitations. The same result appears in those counties of England where agriculture is equally advanced. Nor is the fact of a stationary or declining population, in districts purely agricultural, confined to countries where land is owned and occupied under the peculiar conditions which prevail with us. In France where, as is well known, very different conditions of property and of tenure exist, the same fact nevertheless appears. Whatever increase of population arises in France, is an increase in the towns, which does not do much more than keep pace with the decrease of population in the rural districts. It is stated in an interesting article in the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*"\* of last month (May, 1866), that the greater number even of the small towns and villages in France remain stationary, or actually decline in population. More than half the departments of France are declining in population; and it is remarkable that one of these most nearly resembling the Highlands in the conditions of physical geography, the department of "*Les Basses Alpes*," is specially mentioned as having lost since the middle ages more than one-third of its population. It is a still more remarkable example of the operation of the same great law, if it be true, as the same article asserts that a similar result appears even in the new world, and that a great number of the agricultural districts in New England have lost a great part of their population by double emigration, one into the great commercial cities of the coast, another to that same far west which is attracting so many millions from the crowded populations of Europe.

Is it then a sentiment founded upon reason, is it a wise philosophy, which deplores, and regards as the symptom of decline, a phenomenon which, as a matter of fact, is exhibited over so large a part of the most thriving nations of the world, and which, as a matter of theory, can be connected so certainly with the very causes of our prosperity, and with the most convincing evidences of our growth in knowledge?

\* "*Du Sentiment de la Nature*," par M. Elie Reclus.

Such are the general facts and principles which account for, and satisfactorily explain, the continuous emigration of the Highlanders, so far at least as it has yet gone. But here the question arises, how far has it gone? It is true that there are particular districts less populous than they once were, but the counties, as a whole, have all gained in population since the beginning of the century, except the county of Argyll. Argyll in 1801 stood at 81,000, and in 1831 had reached its maximum at 100,000; it is now only 79,000. But Inverness was only 72,000 in 1801, and is now 88,000; Ross and Cromarty had 56,000 in 1801, and has now 81,000.

The theoretical result to which those who deplored that emigration have always looked forward, was no other than this—that the Highlands would become a mere grazing ground of the southern counties and of England—tenanted by a few large capitalists and by a few solitary shepherds. This is the result which those who do not know the Highlands, very commonly suppose has actually arrived. They think that tillage is diminishing, that fertile land is being given up to sheep, that little or nothing is being spent on the improvement of the soil. I have no hesitation in asserting that this is a pure delusion, a delusion as gross—and this is saying much—as has ever prevailed in England respecting the social condition of the most distant countries of the earth, and which is the less excusable when it is propagated respecting a country every part of which is within thirty-six hours of London. It is perfectly true that there are many spots in the Highlands which were formerly tilled which are tilled no longer; but this is only saying that the rude and ignorant agriculture of other days is gone. It is perfectly true that millions of acres are now under sheep which formerly supported, during half the year, the cattle of the summer sheiling, and for the rest of the year was ranged over by nothing but the eagle and the fox. But this is only saying that the true and natural use has been found for those upland pastures, which now maintain throughout the year thousands upon thousands of the most valuable of the animals which minister to the wants of man. It is perfectly true that glens which once maintained, with frequent famines, and with occasional assistance from unwilling Lowlanders, a population which lived in idleness, ignorance, and poverty, are now tenanted perhaps by some one or two, or three or four or five tenant farmers; but this is only saying that at last that change has come in the Highlands which had come long before in the Lowlands and in England, and which has been in every portion of this country the one indispensable condition of an improved and improving agriculture. Unfortunately, and as I think, much to our national discredit, we have not hitherto had any statistics of agriculture which are of any value: but the general fact is notorious to all who know the Highlands, that tillage has not been



decreasing, but on the contrary has been increasing, and that enormously. It has retired indeed from the steeper banks and braes, and from the light shingly soils which were formerly the only soils adapted by natural drainage for cereal cultivation. It has retired also for the most part from the little patches among the rocks on which the ancient populations raised their handfuls of barley. But for every acre which has been thus abandoned to pasture, probably not less than ten acres have been added during the last century to the tillage land of the Highland counties. The valleys have to large extent been cleared and drained, and fields of turnips are yearly extending their boundaries up the slopes of the lower hills. Comfortable farmsteads have been and are being rapidly substituted for the rude and rickety buildings of the older system.

And to this improved and extended tillage, sheep farming has been not a hinderance or a substitute, but a most powerful stimulant and encouragement. Dairy farming, where it prevails, has contributed to the same result. My own impression is, not that there is too little, but that there is too much cereal cultivation in the Highlands. Except in certain districts of fine land and a comparatively favourable climate, corn is not, and can never be, raised at a profit in the Western Highlands. But it forms, or is as yet believed to form, a necessary item in the rotation of crops, and a necessary accompaniment of the turnip cultivation, which is essential for the feeding of all kinds of stock.

Let us now look at the general result as indicated by the state of occupation of land in the Highland counties. It was evident to me, from Professor Levi's paper, that he was entirely ignorant of the facts upon this subject, because he wrote as if land in the Highlands were occupied for the most part either by great capitalists holding miles of country under sheep, or else by the old crofter class, of whose condition he gave such a deplorable account. No allusion, whatever, was made to any middle class of tenantry, and accordingly in my address to the Highland Society at Inverness, I took occasion to refer to this strange omission. Professor Levi in the letter to the "Morning Post," to which I have already referred, confirmed the impression I had derived from his paper, and says specifically that he apprehends very few of that middle class of tenants exist in the Highlands. Of course the definition of classes is somewhat indeterminate. Let us, therefore, assume a definition for the purpose of arriving at determinate results. In the Lothians and in other districts of high farming, a farm of 1,000*l.* a-year rent would not be reckoned in the class of large farms; neither would it be so considered among the great grazings of the north. But I will take a much lower figure, I will assume 500*l.* a-year rent as the dividing line—farms below that rental only being reckoned as belonging to

the middle class, and holdings between 20*l.* and 100*l.* to the class of small farms, all below 20*l.* to the crofting class. Now here we are upon ground where the facts can be clearly ascertained, and can be represented in statistical returns, which are not only authentic but authoritative, and are accessible to all. The valuation roll of the counties in Scotland, made up under the provisions of the law, and upon which all county assessments are raised, shows the actual value of every holding in the county, and the aggregate value of the whole. I have had the valuation roll of all the four counties in discussion examined, and the following is the result :—

In Argyleshire there are 5,095 occupiers of land, and of this number only 62 pay above 500*l.* a-year, leaving no less than 5,033 tenants, all belonging to the middle or lower classes of occupations. Of these again no less than 1,882 belong to the middle class properly so called, that is, tenants paying a rent between 20*l.* and 500*l.* And of these again 796 lie between 100*l.* and 500*l.* I may farther add, from my own knowledge and observation, though I have not the precise return, that a very large proportion of the farms between 100*l.* and 500*l.* are really farms under 300*l.* Below 20*l.* there are still no less than 3,151 crofter occupiers in the county of Argyll.

The total rental represented by the tenants above 500*l.* is 45,247*l.*, showing an average of between 700*l.* and 800*l.* a-year. The rental represented by the crofting class is 22,334*l.* The rental represented by the classes above them is 262,899*l.* So that, in fact, if we took as our standard the state of occupancy in some of the Lowland counties, we might fairly say that the whole county of Argyll is held either by the small class, or by the middle class of farmers.

In the county of Inverness the results are not dissimilar. The total number of tenants is 4,951; and of these again only 63 belong to the great capitalist class, paying upwards of 500*l.* a-year; 491 are between 100*l.* and 500*l.*; 978 are between 20*l.* and 100*l.*, whilst 3,419 belong to the crofting class. It thus appears that by far the largest portion of both counties are held by a middle class of occupiers properly so called. In Inverness the rental represented by the 3,149 crofters is only 25,191*l.*, whilst the rental represented by the three classes above them is 197,513*l.*

In Ross-shire the figures stand thus: total number of tenants 6,095. Of these only 40 are above 500*l.* rent; 333 pay between 100*l.* and 500*l.*; no less than 591 between 20*l.* and 100*l.*, and 5,131 less than 20*l.* representing the crofting class. The total rental of the county is 193,000*l.*, and the crofters pay of this only 25,491*l.*

Compare this state of occupancy with that of East Lothian, long considered, and with truth, the very garden of Scotland. The agricultural rental is 173,000*l.*, and this great rental is paid by the com-

paratively small number of 376 tenants; of these there are only 41 under 20*l.*; between 20*l.* and 100*l.* there are 63; between 100*l.* and 500*l.* there are 119; and above 500*l.* there are 153; so that in one of the Highland counties (Argyll) of which Professor Levi says there are very few middle class tenants, there are no less than ten times the number of that class that are to be found in East Lothian.

These figures prove conclusively that it is a delusion to suppose that the old crofting class of tenantry has been sacrificed in order to make way only, or even principally, for great grazing capitalists. They prove that the bulk of the Highland counties are being possessed by a middle class of tenantry, with holdings accessible to men of small capital, and actually held by many of the old inhabitants of the country—almost all of them above 100*l.* having the usual Scotch tenure of a nineteen years' lease.

Whilst on this point I may notice an observation which fell from Mr. Mill, in one of the late discussions on the Irish Tenure of Land Bill. Mr. Mill referred to the fact that Britain is the only country in the world where land was held almost exclusively in large estates, occupied by a class of capitalists selected by competition, and with the labouring class for the most separated altogether from either the ownership or from the occupancy of land. Now this involves I think a very erroneous conception of the facts—or at least a very partial and incorrect representation of them. It is indeed quite true that the labouring classes are for the most part separated from the ownership of land; but it is a great mistake to suppose that they are separated from the occupancy of land. The occupation of land by great capitalists, selected by competition, is indeed the condition of those counties and districts, especially in Scotland and the north of England, where agriculture is most advanced: but this is a wholly incorrect description of the class which chiefly occupies land over a great part of very thriving districts both in England and in Scotland.

It is of course not easy to give a strict definition of the labouring classes, and the mere fact of being in possession of a bit of land as a tenant still carries with it, especially in the Highlands, a social standing and position which is highly valued. So far as this mere social feeling is concerned there is a clear line, though not a very tangible one, between a labourer and a tenant. But I should say of the whole body of tenantry having farms under 300*l.* or 400*l.* a-year, that they are emphatically working men. They take a principal part in the labour of their own farms; they help to shear the corn, to carry the corn, to thatch the stacks, and their sons and often their daughters contribute the most efficient labour they employ. I know no position which combines in so eminent a degree some social consideration with continuous, active, and honourable

labour as the position of the small farmers, who pay the great bulk of agricultural rent in all the western and northern counties of Scotland. And here I stop for a moment to say, that I regard this class of small farmers,—that is of farmers belonging essentially to the labouring classes,—as a valuable link in the social chain. I should deeply regret to see the West of Scotland tenanted, as a great part of the East of Scotland is, exclusively by a class of great capitalists, and with no holdings of land which are accessible to men of comparatively limited means. There is a natural tendency in this direction, because small farms involve increased expense in the number of farm buildings. But I am satisfied that there are other advantages which economically make up to proprietors for this difference; and there is the immense satisfaction of seeing a more numerous, and at least an equally industrious, tenantry. In Scotland the more permanent and costly improvements are generally executed by the landlord; but I am sure that we owe much to this class of tenants, in that steady increase in the value of land which has been so remarkable in Scotland, and nowhere more remarkable than in the Highlands.

And here I would remind the Society that the Highlands, as much as any other part of Scotland, are far in advance of the greater part of England in respect to sound principles of tenure. As a general rule, all agricultural tenants above 50*l.* of rent, hold under leases of ample duration, to secure to them the fruits of their industry and their outlay. In no part of Scotland is there less sympathy than among Highland proprietors, with the feeling so prevalent among proprietors in England, that to grant long leases to agricultural tenants is to part with a discretion and a power essential to the enjoyment of property. I recollect, not long ago, asking an English proprietor who had purchased a considerable property in the Highlands, how he liked it, and whether he often went there. "Oh," he said, "I have nothing to do with it now." I thought he must mean that it no longer belonged to him, and observed that I had not heard of its having been resold. "Oh," he said, in explanation, "I've not sold it—but I've let it on that abominable Scotch "system of yours—on a lease for nineteen years; and of course "I can't take the same interest in it as before; I consider that "I have parted with the property, so far as regards my personal "pleasure in it, for the term of the lease, and as I don't expect to "outlive it, I've virtually parted with it for my life." There is no such feeling—irrational feeling as I must be allowed to call it—among Highland proprietors. And here I cannot help saying that this feeling is founded on customs and associations which I am satisfied are even more injurious to proprietors than they are to tenants. The truth is, that as regards the mere personal interests

of tenants, the objections made to tenancies at will are very often exaggerated. It is perfectly true that in almost all old estates in England the tenants are, in a sense, as secure against being turned out as if they held under lease. Custom, and the position and character of landlords, make it morally impossible for them to make unjust and arbitrary changes, and, as a matter of fact, I am told that some of the most improved parts of England are so held. But as regards the interests of proprietors, I have never had a doubt that the operation of leases is all in their favour. Under tenancies at will no time ever comes when as a matter of course the bargain between landlord and tenant is revised. To revalue farms held from time immemorial, and to impose an entirely new scale of rents, is a step which must be gratuitously undertaken by the landlord, and is often considered a hardship by the tenant. But the termination of a lease is of necessity a time for reconsideration of terms and for revisal of rents. When a proprietor has let his land for a period so long as nineteen years, he feels that he has a right at the end of it to realise any increased value which may belong to that land, whether that increase of value arises out of improvements to which he has contributed, or to the natural rise in the value of its produce. Accordingly, whether that value is brought to the test of open competition, or whether it is estimated by the judgment of valuers, a readjustment of rent is always the result, and this is a result which being periodically repeated at the end of every lease, tends to raise the rental of land and to keep the methods of agriculture up to the newest measures of knowledge and of skill.

I am satisfied that this is the real cause of the higher rental of land in Scotland as compared with England—a difference which as regards a great part of England is very observable, but does not exist in the case of those border counties where the Scotch system of leases prevails.

I must observe, however, that the good effect of leases can only arise in the case of tenants who not only have industry and some capital, but whose holdings are of a kind and of an extent which, under the local conditions of soil and climate, and of markets and produce, are sufficient to exercise that industry to advantage. To give leases to tenants whose knowledge and whose industry were such as you have heard described as prevalent in the Highlands eighty years ago, would be simply to perpetuate a system of agriculture incompatible with any improvement whatever. Even when habits of industry have improved and have become established, holdings which are too small to support or to give room for an improved husbandry, ought of course not to be kept up under the protection of leases. It must always be a local question, where and under what conditions small crofts can be permanently held with advantage.

In the east of Ross-shire there is a thriving class of crofters who, I am informed, hold generally under nineteen years' leases, and where extensive improvements have been effected by this class and by a class somewhat higher. And in this lies the great mistake made by those who advocate either fixity of tenure, or any step towards fixity of tenure indiscriminately for all tenants, and especially for the cottier tenantry of Ireland, where a very low standard of living is the standard of the people, and no want is felt for the comforts of civilization. Where skill and knowledge and capital are alike unknown security of tenure does but increase and perpetuate the worst evils in the condition of an agricultural population. The truth is, that the miseries and starvation of the cottier tenantry of Ireland have arisen under a system of very long leases, for indefinite terms of lives, held by middlemen, who subdivided their farms to a population contented if they lived at all on a few potatoes and a little milk. And be it remembered that every tenant becomes a middleman who has a holding capable of being subdivided, that is, capable of containing a few more hovels and a few more potato rigs. Long leases under such conditions of society have been, and must always be, the prolific source and origin of evils which it may take generations to remedy. I believe that the emigration which so many are now deploring in Ireland, is nothing but the remedy which nature affords for a long continued disregard of her economic laws. I shall not believe that emigration to be excessive till wages in Ireland rise to a higher level, nor until the scramble for potato grounds among a pauper tenantry gives place to legitimate competition among a class of farmers who have some knowledge and some capital, and whose scale of living compels them to demand a reasonable profit. To them let leases be given in all cases, and we shall then see in the West of Ireland, what we have already seen in the West of Scotland—an improving agriculture and a thriving people.

But we may well be asked, after the account I have given of the Highlands, how it happens that the world has heard so often of Highland distress, and has been appealed to for pecuniary aid in relief of that distress? My answer is, that this distress has existed, and has existed only, in those districts of the Highlands where the old conditions of society have not yet given way before the advance of sheep farming or of dairy farming, and those changes in the occupation of land which are a necessary step towards an improved husbandry. It has arisen exclusively among the old class of small crofters, which still exists along the west coast, and especially in the Islands. The best way of bringing this home to the mind of the Society, will be to exhibit a map of the Highlands, showing where that distress existed during the last period in which it attracted general notice, viz., during the years of the potato famine. It will be

seen at once that the distressed districts are precisely those in which the old crofting system is still lingering. Wherever the crofts have been consolidated into farms of moderate size, no distress has ever arisen from the failure of potatoes. But this is a process which cannot be carried into effect without a reduction in the number of the people who now derive from the land a scant and precarious subsistence. The same conclusion can be drawn from the facts of pauperism as existing at the present moment, and with the view of bringing those facts in an authoritative form before the Society, I now add the following memorandum on the subject, kindly furnished to me by Sir John McNeill, K.C.B., who presides over the Poor Law Board in Scotland:—

“ In 1851 the population of Scotland, according to the census of that year, was 2,888,742, and that of the four principal Highland counties (Argyll, Inverness, Ross and Sutherland), was 294,497.

“ At 14th May, 1851, the total number of poor on the roll (including dependents), in all Scotland, was 113,086 (being one pauper to every 25·5 of the population); and in the four Highland counties 14,856 (being one pauper in every 19·8 of their population).

“ In 1861, the population of Scotland was, according to the census of that year, 3,062,294. The increase from 1851 to 1861 was, therefore, at the average annual rate of 17,355, which would give for 1864 a population of 3,114,359. But that of the four Highland counties was then 275,345, showing an average annual decrease of 1,915, which would give for 1864 a population of 269,600.

“ At 14th May, 1864, the total number of poor on the roll (including dependents), was, for all Scotland, 120,705, being one pauper in every 25·8 of the population; and in the four Highland counties 13,341, being one pauper in every 20·2 of the population.

“ In the county of Perth, where the population is, for the most part Highland, and where the decrease of the population during the ten years referred to was at the average rate of 529 per annum, or 5,291 in ten years; and where, too, the old crofting system, which was in full operation a century ago, has almost ceased to exist, the proportion of paupers to population, at 14th May, 1864, was one in every 25·7, very nearly the average of all Scotland, which at that date was 1 in 25·8. In 1860 it had been 1 in 25 in Perthshire.

“ In the county of Argyll, where the decrease of the population, in the ten years referred to, was at the average rate of 922 per annum, and where the old crofting system has been much more extensively maintained, the proportion of paupers to population

“ was, at the same date, one in every 17·1 of the population. In 1860 it had been 1 in 16·1.

“ In the Mull poorhouse combination, including the parishes of Ardnamurchan and Morven on the mainland, together with the islands of Mull, Iona, Tiree and Coll, the estimated population for 1864 is 16,363, and the number of paupers (including dependents), at 14th May, 1864, was 1,250, or 1 in every 13 of the population; while the proportion in the neighbouring poorhouse combination of Lorn, with an estimated population of 12,969 in 1864, was, at the same date, 1 in 16·3. In the Isla combination it was 1 in 14·5. In the Lochgilphead poorhouse combination it was 1 in 18·5. In the southern district of Cantire, including the parishes of Saddell and Skipness, Campbelton and Southend, with an estimated population, in 1864, of 11,148, the proportion was 1 in 18·4. In the district of Cowal, on the other hand, which touches the lowlands and stretches along the Firth of Clyde, including the parishes of Dunoon and Kilmun, Inverchaolain, Kilfinnan, Kilmodan, Lochgilphead, Strachur and Strathlachlane, with an aggregate estimated population, in 1864, of 10,035, the proportion of paupers to population is only 1 in 30.

#### *Recapitulation.*

Mull poorhouse combination .....	1 in 13·0
Isla combination .....	1 „ 14·5
Lorn poorhouse combination .....	1 „ 16·3
Southern district of Cantire .....	1 „ 18·4
Lochgilphead poorhouse combination.....	1 „ 18·5
Cowal district .....	1 „ 30·0

“ Any one acquainted with the county of Argyll will at once perceive that this progressive diminution in the proportion of paupers to population corresponds closely with the diminution in the proportion of the population depending for subsistence on the produce of small crofts, and that the proportion of paupers increases as we recede from the districts in which the old crofting system has been superseded, and the system of the more advanced parts of the country has been established.”

I will now shortly restate to the Society the facts and conclusions which can, I think, be satisfactorily established in regard to the past and present economic condition of the Highlands :—

1. That before the end of the last of the civil wars, the condition of the population was one of extreme poverty and frequent destitution.

2. That on the close of those wars, and the establishment of a settled Government, there was, during half a century, a rapid increase of population.



3. That this increase was out of all proportion to the means of subsistence.

4. That the introduction of potato cultivation increased the evil of a rapid increase in population, without any corresponding increase in skill or industry.

5. That the emigration of the Highlanders arose as a necessity out of this condition of things, and was in itself the first step towards improvement.

6. That the introduction of sheep farming was a pure gain, not tending to diminish the area of tillage where tillage is desirable, and turning to use for the first time a large part of the whole area of the country, which was formerly absolute waste.

7. That for the old bad cultivation of small crofters there has been substituted for the most part a middle class of tenantry, thriving, holding under lease, and exhibiting all the conditions of agricultural prosperity.

8. That the displacement of population by the introduction of great capitalists holding farms of very large value, has not taken place in the Highland counties to an extent nearly equal to that in which it has taken place in some of the richest counties of Scotland.

9. That the process which has been going on in the Highland counties, of a diminution in the population of the rural districts, is the same process which has long ago been accomplished in the other counties of Scotland and in England.

10. That in their case it was also deplored under the same economic fallacies—fallacies which are now applied only to the Highlands because the process is not yet completed.

11. That the prosperity of the Highlands will only be complete when the process shall have been completed also.

12. That no part of Scotland, considering the late period at which improvement begun, has advanced so rapidly, or given within an equal space of time, so large and so solid an addition to the general wealth of the country.